THE LOST PROVINCES.

How Vansittart Came Back to France.

By Louis Tracy.

CHAPTER XVIII.

The Cottage of Hans Schwartz.

The Graemes of Netherby never mounted their willing steeds with greater alacrity than was displayed by the aides-de-camp whose duty it was to carry to generals of divisions Vansittart's orders for a general attack.

Vansittart was about to move to a slight hill on the left of the Metz road when his watchful eye chanced upon Folliet.

"Have you brought a regiment of police, monsieur?" inquired Jerome.

"No, O, no. Just myself."

"But tell me—I have a moment to spare. Surely some extraordinary event has dragged you thus far from Paris and into our biggest battle?"

"Yes, monsieur. The farm of Hans Schwartz is beyond Gravelotte, by the side of the Metz road. I want to inspect that farm tonight."

"Ha. Then you think we will help you to get there?"

"I am sure of it."

"There are 400,000 Germans in the way. I wish I were assured of it myself, though I believe we will get the best of the struggle."

"Yes, 400,000 Germans; but they have the kaiser to direct them. I know him well. He plays the conqueror on parade. He cannot smile. He poses. Today's events will overpower him. He will see his mistakes tomorrow."

Jerome smiled at this caustic summary. "Well, we shall see. I hope to meet you near the house of Hans Schwartz."

Beaumarchais' division, the foreign legion in particular, was suffering severely during an orderly retreat. Sullenly, desperately, steadily, the Frenchmen retired before the crushing onslaught of the Hanoverians, now strongly reinforced.

At last the check came. The French guns, admirably screened and disposed, suddenly rained shrapnel upon the advancing Germans. The enemy flinched, halted and reeled back beneath this infliction, and their guns rapidly unlimbered to engage the French batteries.

Soon the infantry combat died into nothingness beside the thunder of the giant encounter that ensued forthwith between the opposing artillerists. Battery after battery galloped up on both sides, and the superior numbers of the German guns would have quickly decided this phase of the struggle were it not that the French had the tremendous advantage of selection of ground.

The nature of the country precluded long range firing, as gunners understand it. Barely a mile separated the most distant batteries, and, here again, in view of the appalling accuracy and effect of the missiles the Germans labored under a drawback.

Their exposed positions rendered the French practice more deadly, and it was clear to the experienced officers on Vansittart's staff that the French guns were able to hold their own against the assailants.

Daubisson rocked in the saddle with admiration.

"There," he gasped, "I told you so. The artillery duel! It is superb. Viola la guerre!

Vansittart heard him and answered not. He simply looked at his watch. But Daubisson fully understood. Five hours in time and three miles in space made a vast difference between his ideal of war and the millionaire's.

Soon the bellowing of the cannon failed to drown the continuous roar of the magazine rifles.

Gallopers came from both flanks to announce a definite engagement with the enemy. At 1:30 p. m. the battle became general, and the tide of conflict surged in red waves over a front extending nearly five miles.

This was a small area for the number of men on the field, and the fight, thus condensed, raged with the greater ferocity. On neither side was there sign of yielding.

To the right wing Vansittart sent the imperative order, "Upon no account attempt to outflank the enemy. Hold your ground against all attacks.

To the left, "Stand fast. Fight in square if necessary."

With his glasses glued to the center of the German line he watched and watched with the air of a man that expected something which came not. Four hundred yards in the rear Le Breton, who could see naught of the fight, watched Vansittart.

If the Germans were brave, so were the French. They could die, not unavenged, but they could not break through the living barrier that resisted them.

At a quarter to 3 o'clock he discerned the fluttering lance pennants of a vast body of mounted troops gathered in rear of the German guns.

Vansittart's face flushed with triumph when he saw the rapid preparations in progress behind the batteries.

Turning to the staff he said: "Tell Le Breton to advance at the trot."

Four officers raced off, and an alert air of jubilation swept away the frenzy of the others. But Daubisson gazed at the millionaire, awe-stricken. Now he understood. He approached Vansittart closely, so that he might be heard. "I deal with maneuvers, monsier," he said, "you deal with men."

Even in the anxiety of this supreme moment, for the next ten minutes would irrevocably determine the result of the fight, Jerome was able to reply smilingly:

"It is my only accomplishment, general, but it suffices."

Not until the German horses were fairly launched down the opposite slope did the startled gunners and perplexed colonels of infantry perceive the full extent of the storm about to burst upon them.

Brigade succeeded brigade across the ridge and down the hill, riding in beautiful lines and pouring on over a wide front until 30,000 troopers were in motion gathering pace as they came.

The guns tore gaps in them, hundreds fell before the shower of bullets, but the glittering ranks swept on and the earth thundered with the myriad beats of iron-shod hoofs.

The Germans were still a quarter of a mile from the advanced lines of French skirmishers and men were running back to their regiments for dear life, when a great roar of delight went up from the French army.

Le Breton, leading the Eighteenth chasseurs, followed by the cuirassiers of the garde and many another crack cavalry corps, rode grandly across the bridge and onward to meet the German onslaught.

Owing to Vansittart's foresight, the French troops were fully equal in strength to their opponents and they now had the inestimable aid of the down gradient in their favor.

The kaiser saw the advance of Le Breton long before the majority of the French army were aware of it.

Thus far throughout the day he had been rigid, inscrutable, Napoleonic.

But now he abandoned himself to white rage. He knew that he had failed, that his theatrical blow would recoil upon himself, that a quicker intelligence than his had read his plans and simply awaited his move to checkmate him with conscious ease.

It was now too late for any human intermediary to stop the magnificent cavalry combat that forthwith took place.

By common consent artillery and infantry alike were silent, and the two great bodies of horse closed together with a great thud that was distinctly audible above the cries of men, the neighing of animals and the clash of weapons.

It was not soon ended. Sixty thousand troops cannot get at one another so quickly. Charge after charge took place and the ensuing melee revealed a gigantic and disorganized mob.

The Germans at first withstood the French, but it was absolutely impossible to make headway, and a time came when Vansittart could discern a definite movement backwards into the dip detween the hills.

Instantly he launched forth two big cavalry brigades, Montsaloy in command. They swerved off as they rode and avoided the struggling hosts in the valley.

Up the hill they went, and in a few strides were among the German gunners.

Regiment after regiment followed, until practically the whole of the French mounted arm were in motion. The American had also read the records of Mars la Tour. It was his turn to try the value of Von Moltke's strategy.

The issue was never in doubt for a moment. By 3:15 the German center was crushed, by 4 o'clock the village of Mars la Tour was occupied and the French soldiers were frantically cheering at the base of the statue that looks so piteously toward the lost province of Lorraine; by 5 they were in Gravelotte, and were only withheld by sheer force of discipline from pursuing their routed foes to the very walls of Metz.

Simultaneously with the central advance the French right and left wings attacked Kreuznach and the Grand Duke Albrecht. The one was driven off toward Diedenhofen and the other into the Vosges.

Wilhelm's defeat was complete and utterly disastrous. If the mobilization of France were only on a level with that of her hereditary enemy there was a splendid opportunity for the investment of Metz and an advance to the left bank of the Rhine.

Some enthusiasts did urge Vansittart to press forward beyond Metz with two strong columns, but Jerome quietly repressed them. In the moment of victory the born tactician knows the value of restraint.

Now that the battle was won the millionaire's anxiety redoubled. There was little fear of an effective rally in the vicinity of Metz for some days at least, but it was a ticklish question to decide how best to follow up the advantage already gained.

Was it possible to invest the great frontier fortress with the troops at his disposal, and at the same time ward off the attacks which would surely be made from Strassbourg and Diedenhofen?

He must take thought. In a multitude of counselors might be found wisdom. So he summoned an assembly of divisional commanders and the general staff at the small inn in the center of Gravelotte, the house at which Napoleon III and the prince imperial slept on the night before the battle of Vionville.

Meanwhile where was Folliet? Weak from the fierce exhaustion of the fight, hoarse with the involuntary cries he uttered as he followed up the French advance, yet professional zeal came to his aid. The abandonment of the conqueror yielded to the pertinacity of the sleuth hound. Even as he partook of some slight refreshment he plied his quest among the dazed villagers.

He could not get them to collect their scattered wits until a postman, an old soldier, put in an appearance. On him the detective fastened eagerly.

"Where is the house of Hans Schwartz, friend?"

"Hans Schwartz, the farmer! Why, close to the Bois des Ognons. I know it too well, confound the place and Hans Schwartz, too."

"So. 'Tis a long walk, then?"

"A good mile from the village, and he had more letters than ever man needed who only went to Metz for the weekly market."

"Sayst so. When came these letters?"

"Some from Metz, but most from Paris and Berlin."

"Have you long served in this district, postman?"

"Ever since the war."

"A lifetime! And not a postmaster yet?"

"Ha, ha. Postmaster! That's good. Who am I to be made a postmaster? Not that I am unable for the work, but I have no influence."

Folliet bent his piercing eyes upon the intelligent face that smiled so broadly at the preposterous suggestion.

"Listen, postman," said the prefect of police. "Answer me fully and carefully and you become a postmaster within a week. Take this as earnest of my words. Men do not give away 100-franc notes for a jest."

The simple minded villager gazed with wonder upon the crumpled piece of paper in his hand.

"Bonne vierge!" he murmured. "No wonder men oft say that a war does good."

"Take time to reply," went on Folliet, motioning the man closer and dropping his voice. "How long has Hans Schwartz lived in the farm near the wood?"

"Not long. Eighteen months, perhaps."

"Whence came he?"

"From the Strassbough, they said. He was no farmer, as any man could see. How he made a living I cannot tell, as he only scratched his land. Perhaps he sold some of his birds."

"Birds. What birls?"

"Pigeons. He was a great pigeon flyer, was Schwartz. He was constantly sending them off in crates and they told me at the station they were addressed to Chalons or Verdun or Nancy, sometimes to Paris."

Folliet knitted his brows for a moment. Then he laughed dryly. Of course it would arouse suspicion if the pigeons were invariably consigned to Paris. So they were met at the other places and taken to the capital.

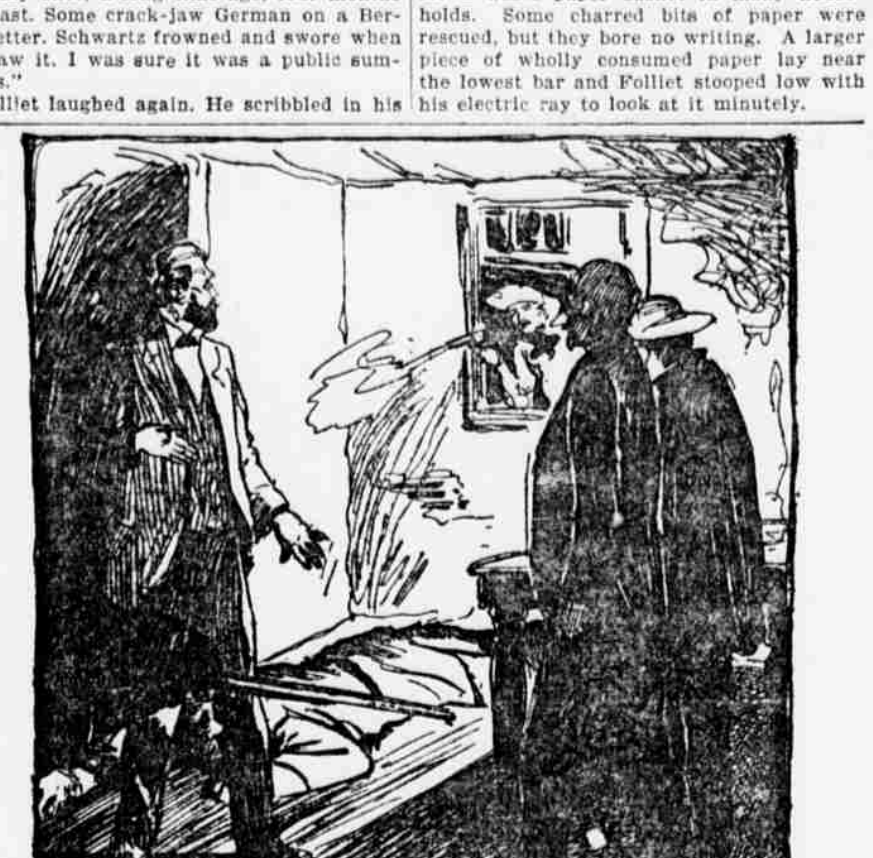
"That postoffice of yours is built. Proceed."

"Well, let me see. It was only of late that he had so many letters. They came in different handwriting from Paris, but always the same writing from Berlin—a square hand, official I called it."

"I call you a gem. Were there any printed addresses or seals on the envelopes?"

"Only once, a long time ago, four months at least. Some crack-jaw German on a Berlin letter. Schwartz frowned and swore when he saw it. I was sure it was a public summons."

Folliet laughed again. He scribbled in his notebook the German for "police headquarters" and showed it to Noir, saying:



A TONGUE OF FLAME HISSED THROUGH THE WINDOW.

"Anything like that?"

"De Dieu en Dieu! The very words. You are a wizard."

"Nay, I but conjure with thy wits. Were you friendly with Hans Schwartz?"

"Not I. He was a surly brute, and I hated the hill to his house."

"Where is he now?"

"Well, his place was terribly damaged by Colonel Montsaloy during the great ride, but he still lives there, unless he was driven out by the battle today. For two hours some German guns were posted near the Bois des Ognons."

"Will you guide me thither?"

The oddly assorted pair walked on down the street. They passed the village inn as Vansittart stood at the open window to draw a quiet breath of air before the council of war set to its deliberations. An absurd rumor had traveled from the rear that he had been wounded toward the close of the day's operations, and he was now purposely showing himself to all who passed.

Something in Folliet's manner impressed him, and he sent hurriedly for Arizona Jim.

"Jim," he said, pointing to the fast walking coupie, "Folliet is on the trail. This locality is dangerous just now, and I cannot spare him. Follow him unobtrusively and take care of him."

CHAPTER XIX.

Pigeons, Some Hawks and a Telegram.

The house to which Francoise Noir led the prefect stood near the crest of a hill crowned by a thick clump of trees.

They followed the bridle path from Gravelotte to Arsur-Moselle for a short distance, and then turned off through some ploughed land. Bates kept them well in sight.

"How long is it since you saw Schwartz, Francois?"

"O, it may have been last evening, in the village, drinking with the estaminat of the Black Dog."

"Alone?"

"O, dear, no. He was talking quite a long while with two men, one an officer and the other an older chap in plain clothes."

Folliet naturally puzzled the straightforward letter carrier with questions. They approached the dismantled farm house in silence, Noir covertly glancing at the other and wondering what was the hidden meaning of his words and actions.

The place was dreary enough in ordinary times and now looked positively woebegone. French shells had torn gaps in the roof and walls. The place looked deserted and forbidding whilst several dark objects huddled up near the verge of the wood gave ghastly evidence of the loss sustained by the Saxon battery, which had temporarily held the position.

Folliet was about to enter the main room when the soft cooing of pigeons fell upon his ear. Following the sound he reached a sheltered loft in the rear of the premises, climbed to a small window by means of a ladder and found three birds pecking at the remains of the last supply of grain given by their attendant.

He quickly examined them. One bore a small quill securely fastened. With this treasure-trove he descended the ladder and opened the rolled-up scroll. It read:

"P. 18, 6, 2 p. Soon, perhaps tonight. No fear of failure. R."

If, as he believed, the opening letter and figures meant, "Paris, June 18, 2 p. m.," the fleet messenger had but recently arrived. Further, it had not come from No. 11, Rue Pigalle, as this was impossible, the house being in possession of Pigot and the other police agents.

Here was proof positive that there were others in Paris who communicated with Schwartz. Who were they? Who was R? What would happen soon—or tonight—which could not fail?

Folliet was viciously vituperative for a moment. Why could he not drive from Gravelotte to the prefecture of the Seine? If only some inventor could equal the pigeon as a flying machine!

Francois Noir watched him. "This rascal Schwartz gives information to the Prussians, then?" he said.

"Yes, and to me, also."

"But, monsieur—"

Folliet cut him short by darting toward the house. The interior was dark and the prefect stumbled over a corpse at the threshold.

Producing a small electric lantern he switched on the battery and examined tne prostrate body, thinking that it might be the proprietor of the farm. But it was a German infantry officer, who had been shot through the forehead with a shrapnel bullet and now lay on his back in the smiling unconsciousness of one who dreams pleasantly.

Folliet made the tour of the house, but the dead soldier was its only occupant.

The place was so bare that a rapid scrutiny revealed the poor chance there was of finding aught likely to prove valuable. Returning to a large room the prefect examined the table. In the table drawer near the fireplace were a bulky volume and some loose sheets of thin paper. Folliet could not resist a cry of surprise when he discovered that the book was a telegraph code in German.

The user was a careful man. To make sure of the code words exactly conveying his meaning he had ticked off each one, and the detective promised himself an interesting hunt through the maze of phrases. On the title page was the significant legend, "Strictly confidential. For state purposes only."

Folliet examined the grate—the substitute for a waste paper basket in many households. Some charred bits of paper were rescued, but they bore no writing. A larger piece of wholly consumed paper lay near the lowest bar and Folliet stooped low with his electric ray to look at it minutely.

If he touched it the black tissue would surely crumble to atoms. Nevertheless he could see quite plainly, showing in the scratches of a pen, the single letter "R."

"Now who the deuce is 'R'?" cried Folliet, aloud, and Francois Noir bent down, that he also might see.

"You had better ask those who know," came in a deep voice from behind them.

Both men sprang up and turned. A tall, rough-looking man, carrying a double-barreled gun, was standing within the doorway, astride of the German officer's body. His eyes blazed with malignant pleasure and he lovingly clutched his weapon, as he poised it in the manner of one on the alert for a covey.

"Hans Schwartz!" cried the postman. "Good evening, Hans; this gentleman wished to see you, so I—"

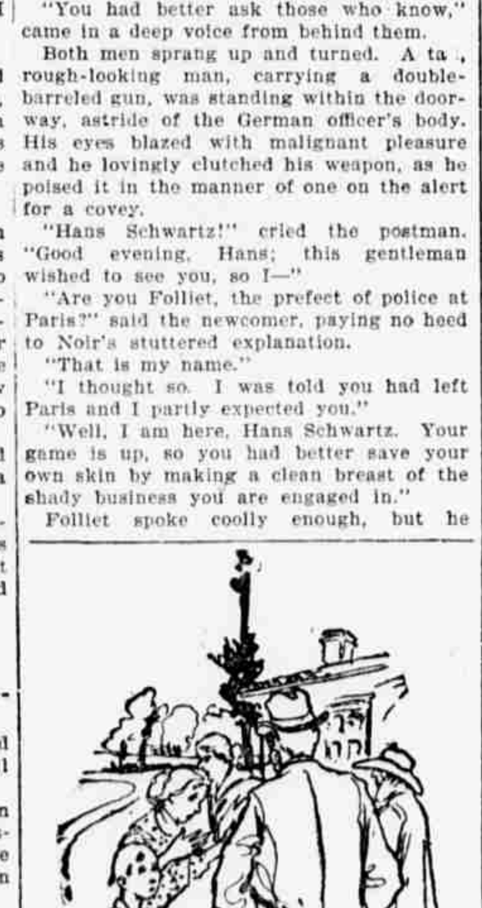
"Are you Folliet, the prefect of police at Paris?" said the newcomer, paying no heed to Noir's stuttered explanation.

"That is my name."

"I thought so. I was told you had left Paris and I partly expected you."

"Well, I am here, Hans Schwartz. Your game is up, so you had better save your own skin by making a clean breast of the shady business you are engaged in."

Folliet spoke coolly enough, but he



HE COULD NOT GET THEM TO COLLECT THEIR SCATTERED WITS.

knew that he was in a desperate position. He felt certain that Schwartz would murder him and the unfortunate Francois in cold blood. For this man, with his excellent French and his calm, self-contained manner, was no bungling clodhopper, but an experienced and able member of the German secret police.

"The game is up, is it?" Schwartz showed his teeth in a ghastly smile. "Well, Folliet, you are right. It is ended, and the loser pays. No. Keep your hands quite still. Otherwise I must shoot you at once. Perhaps—I say perhaps—if you answer my questions I may spare your life and conduct you to Metz as a prisoner. After all, you are a professional, like myself—a devilish clever one, too, and I should be sorry to be compelled to injure you."

Francois Noir, after the first shock of surprise, regained his nerve; the ex-soldier was no coward.

"Look here, Schwartz—" he began.

"Peace, fool. Another word from you and you die."

The German spoke to Noir, but his eyes never quitted Folliet.

"Don't interfere, my poor friend," said Folliet sadly. "This quarrel does not affect you, and, however it ends, I hope Monsieur Schwartz will let you go unharmed."

Schwartz scowled in another smile. "We shall see. Now, Folliet, tell me what was the message you took from my pigeon." Please don't move. You can remember quite well."

"Soon, perhaps tonight, eh?" repeated the German. "Good. Indeed, I may say during your absence, colleague. It would be most awkward for certain people were you in Paris just now."

"Something is going to happen there, then?"

"Oh, yes. Something far better for us than a mere battle, even if we had been victorious today."

"Really, you interest me."

"I am sure of it. I have interested you for weeks, confound you."

"It is true. You are a clever man. And I hope you are a wise one. M. Vansittart is rich. He will reward you beyond your dreams if you help us instead of plotting against us."

"Ah, you would bribe me. I have taken care of that for myself. Your millionaire will pay me more in a week to tell him something he wants to know than he would now give me to rescue France."

It was a new role for Folliet to be played with in this fashion. His pride was wrestling with his reason.

"You take every trick, monsieur. But tell me, as a mere matter of curiosity, who is 'R'?"

The other hesitated a moment. Then he laughed scornfully.

"There is no reason why you should not know. Your old friend, Ribou, aided by another old friend, Laconte, are leading the new commune. Paris is about denuded of troops. Tonight or within twenty-four hours the revolution breaks out and your king and queen will be captured if they are unable to fly. It is going on now, Folliet. Whilst Paris rejoices at the downfall of the kaiser's troops, her own downfall is being arranged. You yourself have told me, and you, the prefect of police, are here in my power, wholly at my mercy. Strange, isn't it?"

Folliet was a small man physically, but he could have swollen with rage to gigantic proportions. His burning thoughts must have leaped from his eyes, for Schwartz half raised his gun.

"Steady, Folliet, steady. You must keep still, else—"

A tongue of flame hissed through the window, accompanied by a sharp report. Schwartz dropped his gun and faced round with a roar of pain, for a bullet had smashed the thumb joint of his right hand, just where it closed round the stock. In turning he stumbled and fell over the corpse.

Arizona Jim, bringing revolver and head into sight between the shattered framework of the first window, said:

"The confab was gittin' warm, Folliet, so I just thought I'd chip in."

Even as he spoke, Folliet darted forward to seize the gun, which had fallen on the table.

Schwartz rose to his knees and gazed at Bates with the glare of a wounded tiger.

"Herr liebe Gott!" he cried, "who is this?"

Though the words were German, Jim grasped their meaning.

"You talk too much, mister. You'll soon find out who I am, for you've got my trademark on you."

Francois returned with a rope.

"Schwartz," said Folliet, "it's my turn now. Place your hands behind your back until Noir ties them. Don't hesitate. I have no time to lose, and I will blow your brains out to avoid delay. You have told me all I wish to know."

The German obeyed. His swarthy face was pallid with pain and desperation, but he managed to screw his features into one of his terrible smiles.

"Not all, Folliet, not all. I still have my revenge left."

"Pooh, a telegram to Paris will slap your precious fellow-conspirators in prison."

"Ah, yes. Ribou and Laconte. They will be shot. But ask Vansittart tomorrow. He will explain."

The man perplexed Folliet, but the urgent need of haste prevented further questioning. With a warm word of thanks to Jim, he asked him to help Noir in escorting the prisoner to the village. Then he tore off rapidly to Gravelotte, for it was 10:30 p. m., and the Paris authorities must be warned of the communist plot, if it were not already too late.

At the council of war, discussion waxed hot as to the next move to be made. The advocates of a forward policy were numerous, but divided among themselves.

"We might either advance or retreat," cried Daubisson, finally.

"Hardly." Vansittart rose and bent wearily over a map. "What I recommend is, that while an army corps of 50,000 men remains here, strongly intrenched, the remainder of our force should line the left bank of the Moselle, from Nancy to Bigny, and thence inland to join the troops of Gravelotte. Meanwhile powerful columns should immediately advance from Verdun and Montmedy toward Diedenhofen, and complete the seizure of the Moselle. In other words, Metz will be partly invested on the French side, while we will be in a favorable position for advance in any direction when our lines of communication are completed and our supports arrive."

As usual, his words carried conviction. More than that, he conveyed by his manner to both Daubisson and Le Breton the pleasant assurance that he had combined both their projects to the best effect.

Once the main question of tactics was settled the council devoted itself amicably to details. Vansittart had, with his left hand, drafted a long telegram to the minister of war, urging him to forward another quarter of a million of troops to the front without delay, when a field telegraph orderly entered with a message.

Jerome had communicated with Evelyn and the king about 6 o'clock. Henri V had long since sent his congratulations, but there was no response from Evelyn.

A glance showed him that this message was from Evelyn and his wearied brain did not for a moment grasp its full significance.

It ran: "I am more than terrified, yet I rejoice that I shall soon be with you. Bear up for my sake. I come with the utmost speed."

When Vansittart awoke to the actualities of the case he forgot the weariness.

To his quick intelligence no protracted thought was needed to extract the terrible meaning of poor Evelyn's distracted message.

Some one, a bitter and malignant enemy, had cleverly managed to send her a bogus message telling her that he was wounded. She had left Paris to seek him. It was a decoy. Evelyn would be captured, perhaps wounded, in order to shake his set resolve to free France from her open foes.

His pale face, with its tense expression and wildly staring eyes, alarmed the officers present. Then he burst from the room, to encounter Folliet in the passage, just returned from the farm.

"Read that."

The chief of police rapidly devoured the words, and, like a lightning flash came the memory of Hans Schwartz's sneer.

"Wait!" he cried, "I will bring definite news."

He disappeared to return instantly with Arizona Jim, Francois Noir and their captive.

Producing a revolver and speaking with the air of a dignified judge sentencing a prisoner to death, he said:

"Hans Schwartz, if you fail to answer my questions fully and truthfully I swear that I will in the next moment send you to answer your crimes before the last tribunal. Who sent a telegram to Mrs. Vansittart announcing that her husband was wounded and required her presence?"

"Herr von Ritterburg, the chief of the Berlin secret police."

"At what hour?"

"When our troops retired, about 5 o'clock."

"From where?"

"Some place behind the French lines. He managed to get through in the disguise of a French soldier."

"What was in the telegram?"

The prisoner, livid with pain and terror, hesitated and the revolver clicked. "I am not sure," he faltered. "I did not see it."

"But you know what was intended to be said?"

"Y—yes. The herr told me he would word it so that the lady would tell no one—to avoid panic in Paris."

"My poor girl!" broke in Vansittart. "She woud obey too well. It is devilish. You hound—to fight with a woman."

"Who devised this infernal plot?"

"I cannot tell. It was an order from high quarters—a last attempt to drive him away from the front—to leave the French troops leaderless."

"You dog; you dogs!" cried Folliet, and he turned from Schwartz.

"Take comfort," he said to Vansittart. "Your authority will clear the wires. She will be traced and pursued within the hour."

Then to Noir: "Lead your prisoner to the guard and let him be taken to the village lockup."

He went out, followed by the postman and Schwartz.

Vansittart sat down near the table and buried his face in his arms in utter despair.

Arizona Jim picked up the telegram and read it. With this testimony he grasped the meaning of much of what had so rapidly transpired.

Tears sprang to his eyes and he tenderly placed a hand on his master's shoulder.

"Go, Jim," he said, "tell Folliet to bring her back to me."

CHAPTER XX.

The Stab in the Back.

Evelyn was sitting quietly and alone in a private apartment at the Tuileries when the telegram was handed to her. It was addressed from Troyon and urged her to keep its details a secret to avoid exciting the public:

But imagine the effect upon Evelyn, sitting there, all her thoughts bent upon the perils which lay thick about her other life, when this inoffensive-looking message was placed in her hands. She leaped up, staring a moment with scared and blanched face about her. Then the instinct of woman for the help and sympathy of man in the hour of her extremity arose at once within her. She ran from the room, making her way toward her brother's apartments near.

Dick had just finished his dejeuner and lay back luxuriously in an armchair. She handed him the telegram. He bent with knit brows over it. Then he said:

"It seems a strange thing, too. It is quite possible, you know, that the thing may be a hoax."

"No, no."

"I don't say it is. But such things have been. It is quite possible."

"I don't know, dear. We shall have to get a special train, I suppose. It may take an hour or two, or three."

"Poor Evie! Try and bear up, won't you?"

"Send a telegram at once. Then the train—"

Gathering strength, she raised her head, went to an escritoire and wrote with fluttering hand the message which Vansittart had showed to Folliet.

Dick took the telegram and summoned his valet. Then he dispatched another messenger for Honorine and bore Evelyn to a couch. By the time the queen arrived he had already set out.

At 4:30 Dick and Evelyn steamed away from the Gare de l'Est.

They continued their journey safely until near 9 o'clock. Night was then falling, and they had reached the little station of Vimes, a mere village. Here the railway officials had arranged to change engines, and Harland, in order to rest his sister and procure her food somewhat more sustaining than any they could carry, settled by telegram to break the journey and rest an hour in the local inn.

The station consists of a mere platform without any building. Ten minutes' walk from it is the inn, bearing on its ancient sign in faded red letters the words, "Le Dragon Dormant." It is of large size, rambling and decayed.

In a quarter of an hour a man came running from the train, asking when the travelers might be expected to continue their journey. The landlord took the message up to the parlor, and not finding Dick there, proceeded to the bedroom. There on his knees he saw him with his arms spread out over the coverlet. But of Evelyn there was no sign.

Then the alarm was raised and spread through the village. By the time the apothecary had arrived it was discovered that the other two guests of the inn had also mysteriously disappeared.

What was now to be done? Dick remained unconscious. The apothecary, at his wits' end, hearing that the gentleman had come in a special train, advised that he should be put to bed in his saloon carriage and taken back to the nearest large town. So he was carried on a stretcher to the train.

The trainmen on their side were of opinion that their right destination now was Paris; and when after a time Dick opened his eyes he was asked whether they should not return to their starting point. He moaned a dull and half unconscious assent, and some time after 2 o'clock in the morning was borne up the great staircase of the Tuileries palace.

About 9 the next morning Folliet arrived at the Gare de l'Est.

He had telegraphed that his carriage should await him at the station; he had some rapid traveling to do that day. As he leaped from the train he ran to the telegraph office and sent a message to the management directing the retention of a special at his disposal; then another to Vansittart, containing this falsehood: "I find already that much is in our favor. Absolutely no ground for despair. Please hope." Then he pelted himself into his carriage and went at a gallop across the breadth of Paris—toward the Tuileries.

In half an hour he was sitting by the side of Dick Harland's bed, holding and patting Dick's hand. But Dick's hand was not easily held that morning. Honorine's fingers were seeking to lull and soothe the flushed forehead; but Dick did not like that either. He was tossing with fever and he was delirious. To Folliet's questions he answered with mere ravings.

"Not much good to be got out of you," muttered Folliet.

But he got from the queen a good description of Dick's wound and decided that it had been inflicted by the butt end of a revolver; and he got this further light from Dick himself—the oft-reepated name of Vimes.

"Vimes, your majesty," he said, "is where the event happened, I suppose?"

"Yes, monsieur. The addresses of the train officials are here and their detailed statements also, sent from the prefecture. All that could be done has already been done in the way of telegraphing to the police all over the country."

But Folliet wished to see the train officials himself. They were off duty and at home. This was his next journey. From them he got no guidance, except the details as to the length of time they waited, and the like. He galloped then to the prefecture, had some hurried interviews, wrote some hurried instructions, re-entered his carriage and started back for the Gare de l'Est.

But half way he looked at his watch and pulled the check rein. He was not far from Rue Brevet. He told the driver to hasten to the Rue Brevet.

At the end of the street he got out and walked to No. 6. He had there a message to deliver, and some instinct told him that in coming here he was very far from losing time. Of the concierge he inquired if M. Armand Dupres was at home.

No—Armand had flown to higher atmospheres. Armand had migrated to No. 147 Boulevard Malsherbes. Armand was rich. Armand was luxuriating in the fortune which Marie derived from her uncle's will. Armand was living in a grand house, if you please, with a fashionable entourage. Armand had a silk hat, and Armand was wearing a frock coat and patent leather boots and an orchid.

No. 147 Boulevard Malsherbes! Folliet hesitated. Could he go? Had he time? He decided quickly. It was not far—he would lose only a few minutes.

Armand occupied a troisieme, the whole of it, with half a dozen unnecessary apartments, all splendidly furnished. When Folliet was shown in he could hardly believe his eyes.

"Ah, Monsieur Dupres," he said, holding out his hand, "You have seen me, yet, I fancy, you do not know me. I have only a few minutes before setting out from Paris. Yet, you see, I come to you. I have a message for you from Mr. Vansittart."

"Pray be seated, monsieur," said Armand.

"No. This is what I have to tell you, and it is soon said. Mr. Vansittart spoke to me of you at a time when he was in a great hurry, and his words were not many. You have invented something?"

"Quite so, monsieur."

"What is it?"

"O, it is nothing; something for killing Germans."

"Mr. Vansittart certainly does not think it nothing, sir. Pray tell me what it is. I have reasons for asking."

"In its present state," said Armand, "it is a contrivance for expelling from a generator a quantity of hydrogen every five minutes sufficient to cover the space occupied by about 1,000 men. The hydrogen is mixed with oxygen and also with carbonic anhydride, the anhydride adding weight to the flying mixture, so that it travels along the ground. So now, monsieur, you know. Instead of shooting your enemy dead, you burn him dead."

"Ah, but, monsieur," said the detective, "what I specially wished to know on the part of Mr. Vansittart is this: Is your contrivance simply made—can it be manufactured by practical workmen without delay?"

"O, quite so," answered Armand. "You know that nothing is simpler than the preparation of the gases in question, and as to the expulsion of gases through a narrow aperture at an intense rate, with that method I suppose you are already familiar. I have, by the way, a model of the thing somewhere about. I make it a present to Mr. Vansittart on the sole condition that he gives me no more bother in the matter."

"But stay, monsieur," interposed Folliet; "I am commissioned by Mr. Vansittart to ask you, firstly, if you will undertake to have at least 100 of your engines of destruction made in Paris so as to be available for the defense of the city if it be attacked? And, secondly, whether you can do this or not, I am commissioned to offer you 3,000,000 francs at once for the invention, the sole rights to all European patents, etc., to remain vested in Mr. Vansittart personally."

Just for one instant, at these tremendous figures, Armand's face paled. Then he was himself again.

"I say, Marie!" he called through a door; "come here, will you? Here are superfluities, and the arrogance of wealth, if you like—"

Marie had been listening behind the keyhole. She stepped blushing into the room, her eyes alight.

"Well, you accept, I suppose?" said Folliet with a smile. "But come—I must be going. If you will undertake to have the hundred machines ready, you will find no difficulty as to money—arrangements at Kasine & Lafitte's, to which firm I was to recommend you. Do you undertake?"

"Yes, monsieur," Armand answered; "as far as I am concerned—"

"Good. Then I'm off."

"Where to, monsieur, if I may ask?"

"To Vimes."

"I thought so. To hunt for Mrs. Vansittart?"

By this time all Paris was discussing the news of the atrocity at Vimes. Armand had heard it with a flush of indignation, and then forgotten it.

"Yes, monsieur," answered Folliet, "just that; to hunt for Mrs. Vansittart."

"Are you likely to find her?"

"Ah—would to God I could say yes. The truth is, I don't know at all."

"Will you be at Vimes tonight, monsieur, at, say, 9 o'clock?"

"Very probably. Why do you ask?"

"O, nothing. I will not keep you. By the way, can you lend me 100 francs? Thank you. So much obliged. Goodby."

"Goodby, monsieur."

As Folliet passed out of the room, Armand turned to Marie; and with strong emphasis, with flushed face, with knit brow, he said:

"This man Vansittart is a confoundedly decent person! There is not a doubt of it! Just pack your trunk and mine. We are off to Vimes this afternoon to find his wife for him."

(To be Continued.)